

William M. Worden, *Cargoes: Matson's First Century in the Pacific*. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1981. Pp. xii, 192, illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$12.95.

As a youth, William Matson went to sea from his native Sweden. Arriving in San Francisco in 1867, he continued to work on ships belonging to others until 1882, when he bought a one-fourth interest in his first vessel, the schooner *Emma Claudina*, which he entered in the San Francisco-Hilo trade. Established lines were already serving Honolulu, but service to Hilo was inadequate despite the rapidly expanding sugar plantations in its hinterlands. From these beginnings the Matson Navigation Company grew. In 1919 Matson vessels carried the entire Hawaiian sugar output to market for the first time. In 1926, the Oceanic Steamship Company, originally owned by the Spreckels interests, became a Matson subsidiary. Eventually Matson's operations came to include not only cargo and passenger vessels, but also airlines, hotels (including the famous Royal Hawaiian), and the immensely profitable Honolulu Oil Company.

Over the years, the Matson Navigation Company became intertwined in the complex web of Hawaiian business relationships. The result is a history that often reveals as much about the islands as it does about the firm. Beginning in 1907 Castle & Cooke served as Matson's agents and in time came to control the line; in 1964 Alexander & Baldwin gained a controlling interest. American Factors and the Dillingham Corporation also played important roles in the Matson story. Still, the rise of pineapple production, the dislocations of World War II, the growth in power of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, and changes in tourism each affected the firm at least as much as did corporate changes and rivalries.

The Matson company grew and prospered not only because of the network of ties it cultivated in the islands and favorable economic developments there and on the mainland, but also because of its balanced combination of fiscal caution and readiness to adopt maritime innovations. Matson introduced the first oil-burning steamship to the Pacific in 1901 and pioneered in the use of shipboard refrigeration and the wireless. The design of the liner *Malolo*, built to Matson specifications, was such that she survived a ramming in 1927 that might well have sunk any other vessel afloat at the time. Following World War II, Matson developed cost-effective methods of transporting sugar in bulk, and in 1958 inaugurated equally pathbreaking containership service.

Maritime history buffs and collectors of Hawaiiana will enjoy William M. Worden's *Cargoes: Matson's First Century in the Pacific*. The author

has an important topic and tells his story well. The book is handsomely produced and copiously illustrated. But scholars will find the book disappointing. Worden's approach is anecdotal and superficial. While part of this may stem from the paucity of sources dealing with Captain Matson and the early years of the firm he founded, more seems to spring from Worden's greater interest in spinning a good yarn than in probing beneath the surface to uncover the interplay of forces that shaped events and decisions. He is uncritical in his use of reminiscences and similar sources and, insofar as one can tell from his inadequate endnotes and bibliography, unimaginative in his quest for archival evidence. Worden has done extensive interviewing in connection with the events of recent decades. As a result, the last half of the book is stronger than the first half, but even here the product is none too satisfactory. Despite interviews with labor leaders and workers, the reader cannot escape the feeling that he is getting a simplified, sanitized view of events as seen from the corporate board room. Failure to more than mention the Congressional investigation that led to cancellation of the South Seas mail contract, or a government loan of \$11.7 million to aid in the construction of new vessels, an inadequate and distorted description of the LaFollette Seaman's Law, and the almost complete ignoring of the Dollar Line also mar the book.

We may yet have a solid business history dealing with Matson Navigation Company. This volume is not it.

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